

31 December 2025

MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Turning 2025 Momentum into a 2026 Reform Imperative for Real Economic Growth

South Africa enters 2026 at a critical inflection point. After years of constrained growth and systemic underperformance in core infrastructure, 2025 marked a year of tangible progress - particularly in logistics, rail, and ports. ***“The task ahead is clear: momentum must now accelerate into measurable reform executed with discipline, to deliver real and sustainable economic growth.”***

While external factors such as politically crafted trade tariffs and other significant global turmoil spread division, discord and disruption across the world, South Africa is writing a new chapter as reform begins to unlock structured private sector participation (PSP) in rail and ports. PSP entrenches the principle of **shared responsibility** across the public and private sectors as infrastructure recovery impacts the entire supply chain, heightening economic performance. South Africa’s role as a leading trade hub and gateway to Africa recognises that ultimately, even the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will depend on logistics infrastructure.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its “*Africa’s Development Dynamics 2025*” (*) report is unequivocal in its assessment: **infrastructure is the engine of economic transformation**, and projects that, with the right policies and level of investment in infrastructure, the continent could boost growth by 4.5 percentage points per year to double its GDP by 2040, **saying this would be dependent on investment being targeted, governance-driven, and supported by strong public-private collaboration**. This outlook is relevant and directly applicable to South Africa and indeed to the Southern African region.

The OECD report lists conditions for success: **a.** prioritising high-return infrastructure projects; **b.** fostering credible public-private partnerships; **c.** strengthening data collection and data-driven decision-making; and **d.** proactively managing social and ecological risks through transparency and accountability. In representation of the forwarding sector and logistics at large - SAAFF is aligned to this outlook. These principles resonate strongly in a constitutional democracy where institutional credibility, evidence-based policy, and public trust are non-negotiable foundations for growth – the direction South Africa must travel.

Against this benchmark, the Southern African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF) reaffirms that South Africa’s logistics sector can point to **real progress in 2025**. A maturing, evidence-based dialogue between government and industry serves as the biggest factor shaping South Africa’s steady economic turnaround.

(*): AUC/OECD (2025), *Africa’s Development Dynamics 2025: Infrastructure, Growth and Transformation*, AUC, Addis Ababa/OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c2b40285-en>.

As an industry, our progress is evidenced in the SAAFF | BUSA Cargo Movement Report, a weekly empirical, science-based logistics analysis that measures performance on-the-fly, providing members high-integrity data that informs medium and long-term strategic direction and underpins sound short-term decision making. This translates into effective risk management and a competitive advantage.

Chief Executive Officer of SAAFF, Dr Juanita Maree says “This progress matters because **logistics is not a technical footnote in economic policy**. It is the bloodstream of trade, industrialisation, and inclusive growth for the nation. Without efficient freight movement, no FDI recruitment programme, industrial strategy, export ambition, or regional integration agenda can succeed.”

Today, as we prepare to close 2025 – a watershed year for logistics it is of critical importance that we recognise major milestones achieved through focused work done, including:

- Year Two - the final year of the National Logistics Crisis Committee (NLCC)
- The Transformation of TRANSNET
- PSP Activation: ICTSI – 25 Year DCT Pier 2 - Port Management and Development Agreement
- The introduction of Private Sector Participation (PSP) programs: **Dpt. of Transport (DoT)**
- The opening by DoT of the Request for Information’ (RFI) processes
- The National Freight Logistics Roadmap. Covering the Road to Rail Strategy
- The introduction of the Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM)
- The deferment for review of the Merchant Shipping Bill (MSB) (DoT)
- **DTIC** Successful focus on Exports yielded
 - Increased AfCFTA trade
 - Exports of more than 1.3 billion to date in the financial year through EMIA (Export Marketing and Investment) Scheme
- **Operation Vulindlela**
 - Regulatory Framework: Introduction of the Economic Regulator of Transport Act
 - Private Sector Participation: First ever PSP for container terminals and establishing of the PSP Unit
 - Rail Access: A draft network statement developed for the freight rail network

Among other targeted interventions, these developments were driven principally by unprecedented cross-sectoral consultation and represent the most credible foundation for reform seen in our country in over a decade. For the logistics and freight forwarding industry, 2025 reasserted the sector’s **central role in enabling economic resilience and global competitiveness**. However, the private sector is unequivocal: **2025 was the beginning, not the destination**.

In 2026, South Africa must shift decisively from policy intent to a implementation discipline. To enable real economic growth, momentum needs to translate into **productive operational transformation** within an intentional and well-governed environment, underpinned by transparency, accountability and clear communication – actions that build trust across sectors and in the system.

Sustainability in logistics is multi-layered. It depends on some critical factors such as political resolve and strong leadership, applied knowledge and skills development, Entering the PSP business model demands it must be a progress underpinned by accountability and transparency - governance at this inflection point is as fundamental as capital investment.



Priority reform areas that require urgent and coordinated execution include – among other:

- Introduction of the Independent Economic Regulator (Transport & Logistics)
- Digitisation and integration across Other Government Agencies (OGA)
- Embedding inter- and intra-port competition
- Introduction of the Container User Forum
- Accelerate rail reform to progress road to rail
- Growth of intermodal integration and capacity development
- Freight Villages -
- Africa trade alignment – across SADC and AfCFTA

Dr Maree noted, the OECD benchmark quoted in this statement deserves to be positioning as a point of reference - as South Africa strives to become Africa's most prosperous, mature economy, a thriving democracy, a country defined by its flagship trusted institutions, competitive infrastructure and delivery-led reform.

“The task before us in 2026 is not simply that of technical alignment, but a conscious commitment to embed the most stringent world standards into practice.” To position South Africa firmly among world economies that translate policy intent into sustained growth and national prosperity is, in global terms, the catalyst of a stronger competitive position. South Africa aspires to be the country in Africa where international investors place their capital and their confidence. To cement this position South Africa needs infrastructure-led growth. In 2026 the national KPI is to **convert alignment into delivery.**

“At SAAFF excellence is the brand's ultimate deliverable – a central strategic pillar and a defining leadership value recognised by our partners and stakeholders here and across the world. Looking ahead, the effective functioning of reform platforms such as the Container User Forum (CUF) - a credible mechanism for structured stakeholder engagement, where accountability is critical now becomes a top priority, alongside the accelerated implementation of rail reform to restore corridor capacity and reliability, and in doing so, secure the future of trade.

“Ultimately, all interventions must be reinforced by the deliberate growth and alignment of intermodal integration for efficiency. In parallel, seamless connectivity through digitisation and system integration of other government agencies such as the BMA is key to the outcomes, to secure increased capacity and seamless connectivity between ports, borders, rail and road.” The 2026 year represents the decisive moment where policy alignment converts into tangible delivery through sustained economic impact.

“If this is achieved, logistics reform will not only support realisable economic recovery but will act as a catalyst for **inclusive growth, regional integration, and an enduring long-term competitive position**. Failure to do so would risk squandering the most promising reform window the sector has seen in years,” concludes Dr. Maree.

Issued by:

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MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

29 December 2025

South Africa Champions of Change Logistics Honours

A National Recognition Platform Advancing Logistics Reform, Trade Competitiveness and Economic Growth

The Southern African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF) is proud to announce the launch of the **South Africa Champions of Change Honours awards**, an annual national recognition programme designed to formally acknowledge and elevate individuals and organisations delivering **demonstrable, transformative impact** across South Africa's logistics and trade ecosystem.

Strategic Rationale

Inspired by the collaborative and innovative leadership that drove the 2025 logistics recovery programme, the SA Champions of Change Honours go beyond the ceremonial event. The programme is deliberately structured as a **strategic reform instrument**, reinforcing innovative behaviour, exceptional leadership and outstanding commitment to multilateral collaboration that directly advances **efficiency, resilience, integrity and competitiveness** in South Africa's supply chains - critical enablers of inclusive economic growth, export performance and national prosperity.

South Africa's logistics and trade performance is a central determinant of economic growth, investment confidence and regional competitiveness. Reform success, however, relies not only on policy and infrastructure investment, but also on **execution-led leadership, cross-sector collaboration and the consistent replication of what works**.

The South Africa Champions of Change Honours respond to this need by:

- Making **excellence visible and replicable**
- Incentivising **delivery-focused leadership and innovation**
- Recognising **collaborative reform across public and private sectors**
- Reinforcing a culture of **accountability, compliance and operational excellence**

Transparent, Four- stage Selection Process

To ensure a credible and a fully transparent recognition process, the programme will employ a four-stage adjudication approach, ensuring recognition is both, community validated and expertly endorsed, reinforcing credibility and transparency.

1. **Empirical Data and Research Based Shortlisting:** This ensures nominations are grounded on measurable impact and evidence of transformative impact.
2. **Public Vote:** Candidate organisations and individuals will be presented to the public, allowing industry stakeholders, clients and the wider community to participate by voting for those they believe exemplify true transformative leadership.
3. **Independent Panel Review:** A panel of independent industry and supply chain leaders, chaired by an impartial adjudicator, will adjudicate candidates using a structured scoring system based on clearly defined criteria, including innovation, operational impact, sustainability, and contribution to sector advancement.
4. **The Awards Event:** The inaugural event, scheduled for the first quarter of 2026 will be a defining moment. The programme designed to recognise, amplify and celebrate leadership that is actively re-shaping the sector.

Backed by a distinguished coalition of leading corporates and institutions as strategic partners, the programme offers strong sponsor alignment, national visibility and a shared commitment to reform, innovation and delivery, the honourable commendations will serve as a powerful platform to celebrate impact, inspire collaboration and accelerate meaningful change across the value chain and into Africa.

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Caption:

Dr. Juanita Maree, Chief Executive Officer, Southern African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF)

